

# TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 57th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Queen's Circle'  
(Kerr, 1999)

Marcusen Sculpture Garden,  
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2021

## President's Message

Iris, like all plants, require water. In the desert, we can usually improve our use of rainwater in the landscape. This month Margot Garcia will be speaking to us about water harvesting. This will be an in-person meeting at my new home where we can also see my 2,000 gallon water harvesting system. My address is: 1660 N. King St. Navigating apps will get you there. After entering our gate, follow the signs to park on the left and walk to the house.

- Kevin Kartchner

*"It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade."*

— Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

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## Upcoming Events

**Next meeting: March 12, 1 PM - Water Harvesting by Margot Garcia, PhD - at Kevin's house and garden, 1660 N King St in Tucson (Houghton and Speedway area). Mask up! Also on [Zoom](#).**

**March 5-6: Orchid Show, Mesquite Valley Growers, 9-5, 9-3:30**

**April 2: TAIS Iris Show - Harlow's Gardens, 9 AM-noon**

**April 3: TAIS tours of members' iris gardens, 9 AM till noon**

**April 9: Master Gardeners Home Garden Tour (& Diane's!), 9AM-3PM**

**April 9: Rose Society Show, Trinity Presbyterian Church, University at 4th Ave., 1-4 PM**

**April 11-16: [American Iris Society Convention](#) in Las Cruces**

## Birthday Wishes to:

<b>Kristee West</b>	<b>Martin Juarez</b>	<b>Sharm Gregoire</b>
<b>Joyce Knill</b>	<b>Sandy Ellis</b>	<b>Kathy Smith</b>
<b>Cindy Long</b>	<b>Jim Ganem</b>	<b>Linda Ammon</b>

♥ to Melania and Tony



*I. madonna* and *I. albicans*

# February Meeting Minutes



**12 February** - Nine members tuned in to our Zoom meeting. Tip from Diane: Triple A Fertilizer in Tucson is an excellent source for GroMore for Roses and assorted soil mixes.

**Business meeting** - Susan, Terry, and Kevin volunteered their gardens for our members tour on April 3. Kevin will ask TBG, too. He will set up a table with TAIS brochures in Diane Tweedy's iris garden on Apr 9 as part of the Master Gardeners tour. He'll man it for an hour or so, then Cindy for 2-3 hrs, and then Kathleen for the final 3 hrs and take-down. Shirley donated five gift memberships and we voted to give three of these away at the tour. Guests will write their names and addresses on a list and we will pick three winners. Joyce motioned, Kathleen seconded, and it was a unanimous vote to spend \$400 for rhizomes for our Auction, \$450 for the Diane Tweedy Memorial Gift Irises for our members, and \$1200 on rhizomes for

our Sale, including \$100 in spurias. Joyce suggested that we consider selling some Japanese iris, too, perhaps potted.

**Presentation** - Terry Swartz on Growing Japanese Irises in Tucson. See notes at right.

**Board meeting** - Six members stayed on for this portion. Kevin inquired as to which positions and events we have written descriptions for and where would be a good place to store these. Sue has detailed notes on the Auction and the Sale, and will write up the Photo Contest. Kevin will write notes on the Show. Google Drive and the TAIS website are places we could store the documents so that they can be accessed. Joyce is considering having two presentations at the Sale: perhaps Kristee on growing irises in beds and Susan on growing them in pots. She heard that one club has someone presenting to those waiting in



8/9 of the Zoom attendees

**We're on the web:**

**[Tucsoniris.org](http://Tucsoniris.org)**

line before the Sale opens. Diane will look into publicity for our Show and other events on the Tucson Backyard Gardeners Facebook page, which has a huge following. She will work on a flier which members can pass out to friends and neighbors as invitations to the events, and which anyone can post on community bulletin boards in grocery stores and deliver to the nurseries in town. Susan reported that 25 of our members have renewed so far.

## **Growing Japanese Irises in Tucson - notes from Terry Swartz's talk**

Terry has been growing Japanese Irises in Tucson for 20 years. He told us that they have been hybridized in Japan for over 300 years, originating from a native species called *Iris ensata*. Terry showed a woodblock print from about 1700 of *Hanashobu* (the art of grouping and displaying Japanese iris) in which ponds of iris were viewed from berms and an artificial hill in the Tokyo region during the Edo period. Flat irises were ideally suited to be gazed upon from above. Known as the **Edo style**, they are one of three styles or forms of Japanese iris. Irises in the **Ise style** are not flat and are best viewed from the side rather than the top.

Continued on p. 3...

...Ise types developed in areas with heavy rainfall and so were displayed indoors, pot and all. Their pendant falls often have a crepe-like texture. The third style, **Higo**, are newer hybrids from old Edo types. In their domed blooms, the style arms are a bit more prominent. Higos have pendant falls and are also shown indoors. There are some novelty forms of Japanese iris, including ball form (do not fully open), claw form (like a raptor claw), hose-in-hose (flower on a flower), and multi-style-arm form (in which the anthers become extra style arms).

You may view several of Terry's Japanese iris at the Yume Japanese Gardens, located immediately south of TBG.

### Cultivation Requirements in Tucson

- Plant in the fall
- Use a rich loamy soil with good drainage
- Keep rhizomes in a bucket of water until planting so that they do not dry out
- They need full sun from December through May, then benefit from partial shade. Terry's are under an ash tree
- They must have cold or they will not flower. 20° to 30° will help set up bloom. Terry said that his Japanese iris used to flower in mid-May and now flower in April
- They need lots of water
- They like "hot heads and cool feet" (keep roots wet and cool)

### Planting

- Terry plants his Japanese iris in resin pots. His pots are by [SunnyDaze](#) and are 24" wide and 19" deep. He buys them online now since Costco discontinued them
- Place piece of screen over the drainage hole on the bottom
- Add 6-8" of composted steer manure over the screen
- Cover this with a 50-50 blend of mushroom compost and cactus mix
- Plant small rhizomes 2" deep and large ones about 6" deep. Press soil down firmly to prevent air pockets
- Placing the rhizome along the edge of the pot gives the plant room to grow. Terry often puts 5 or 6 smaller rhizomes in a pot, evenly spaced and all facing the same direction

### Irrigation and Mulch

- Terry likes drip line with in-line emitters every 6". He recommends purchasing this at an irrigation store for a better-quality line. He buys his at Ewing's on Alvernon at Ajo Way
- In each pot, use a length of this line that contains 20 emitters wrapped into a circle close to the plant(s)
- Cover with a thick layer of shredded cedar mulch to keep evaporation to a minimum
- He keeps his watering schedule the same all year
- Experiment to suit your own microclimate

### Fertilizing

- Like all irises, Japanese iris are heavy feeders
- Terry uses organic food and water-soluble fertilizer
  - Per established pot: 2 c fish meal, 1 c alfalfa meal, 1 c [Milorganite](#), 1 c Osmocote, 1 handful of Epsom salts
- Always water before fertilizing!
- Beginning at the end of February and up to bloom time, he alternates these weekly - fish emulsion and a water soluble fertilizer, such as Magnum Grow Rose Food, Peter's Super Bloom, or a Miracle-Gro type
- During the summer, he feeds them with 1 c Milorganite per month and 1 c of time-release fertilizer, such as Osmocote or Arizona's Best All Purpose Food every 3 months. He also doses them with KeRex chelated iron from Arizona's Best. And remember to keep watering!

### Dividing

- Like other irises, Japanese iris need to be divided about every 3 years
- Trim the leaves, tip whole plant mass out of the pot, and cut off the lower portion of the root ball using a [Hori-Hori](#) knife. Separate the plants, trim the roots and leaf fans
- Keep rhizomes in a bucket of water until ready to plant. If they dry out, they will die

- SC, from my notes

### Some of Terry's Japanese Iris



Top row from left: 'Dino,' 'Silken Charm'  
Middle row from left: 'Saru Odori'  
(pre-1920), 'Queen's Charm'  
Bottom: 'Lake Effect' (all photos by Terry)

## Ready, Set – Showtime! For Irises, that is!



### Preparing iris stalks for a show

#### Do's:

Choose a stalk with at least one bloom

Present the stalk well – see Tips and Tricks, below

Opt for a candelabra-like stalk for tall bearded varieties – flowers held well away from stalk, with branches on each side of stalk

Select a stalk with a gentle S-curve if possible for TB, IB, and BB varieties

Aim for flowers on the upper 2/3's of stalk (the 2/3's rule)

Show many varieties, including older and newer ones – only one stalk per variety, though

#### No No's:

No water spots – water the soil only

No petals touching stalks – use a piece of Styrofoam plate cut into a rectangle with a V notch at each end. Put in place five days before the show to help adjust the positioning. Slide it down daily to widen the gap.

No flowers touching each other – see use of Styrofoam plate above

No bugs, dirt, or debris – carefully remove with a moist Q-tip

No tears or blemishes – tiny tears ok

No missing flower parts

No dead or closing blooms – remove these carefully and unobtrusively

No fingerprints on the stalks – handle stalk by very bottom – can brush on talcum powder lightly to hide fingerprints

No poor presentation – presentation is just as important as a beautiful and perfect blossom

#### Tips and Tricks

Flowers which have opened naturally in the garden are best.

Consider bringing your irises in loose bud to the show the night before so that they will open overnight and be in excellent condition.

An almost-open bud can be slowed down by pinning a paper towel around it before transporting it to the show the night before. Remove towel upon arrival.

Slow a bud down in the refrigerator.

Hasten a bud with watering, especially if the weather has been dry.

Hasten a bud with warmth and bright light, perhaps on top of a water heater, with a nearby lamp.

Cut early if high winds are forecast. Or rain. Always cut early or late in day (most water, etc. in stalk).

Cut stalk at its base in the garden and trim it at the show, if necessary.

## Ready, Set – Showtime! For Irises, that is! continued

### Preparing iris stalks for a show, p. 2



#### Transport irises with utmost care:

Use a bucket with pieces of PVC pipe or rolled newspapers to hold the stems upright. Be sure to add water.

Use PVC pipe and PVC glue to create a carrying contraption - a grid with uprights for the stems and water.

Use a deep bucket, basket, or crate with vases or wine bottles.

#### At the Show:

You must use a vase that has been provided. Fill out and attach a label.

Cut stem if need be so that flowers are on upper 2/3's of stalk.

If stalk is too short, a piece of stalk may be used beneath it to raise it up. Be sure water reaches upper stalk.

Wedge stalks discretely with bits of foam.

Center the main stalk so that it is directly over the vase.

Turn the stalk so that any damaged (torn, broken, or creased) petals are in the back.

Tidying - remove up to 1/4" of damaged foliage, following natural contour of leaf.

- remove spent terminal blossoms and brown sheaths at base of flowers, if necessary. Trim them neatly.
- if there are two blooms per socket, trim one away. Same if there is a bud touching the flower.

Be sure that the best side of the flower stalk is facing forward and that blossoms are not blocked by a leaf. Carefully attach the label to the vase to indicate the front of the stalk.

Collections – the stalks should have similar branching, curves, and number of blooms. They need not be the same cultivar.

**New for 2022:** This is the first year that irises may be shown in containers, per the revised AIS handbook. If your selection is growing in a black nursery pot, please place this inside a more attractive pot (can be terra cotta) and include a clean saucer or similar item under it to keep the tables presentable.

**The irises that you bring do not have to be perfect. Part of our mission is to entice and educate the public about irises. And to have fun! You must have grown the irises that you show, though. (And that is a big part of the fun)!**

**Sources:** Two PowerPoints: "Grooming," by Scarlett Ayres of the Mesilla Valley Iris Society, New Mexico, and "Stalking for the Best of Show," by AIS. Modified and summarized for this handout by Sue Clark for TAIS, 2018; AIS webinar on Growing Irises in Containers by Doug Chyz, 9 Feb 2022.

## Treasurer's Report for February - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance					\$6,589.54	
Date	Pd	MOP	Deposits	Expenses		
2/9/2022	X	#1926		\$500.00		Valenzuela-website 2022-2023
2/9/2022	X	#1927		\$55.30		Knill - postage, supplies
2/9/2022	X	#1928		\$6.00		Clark newsletters
2/10/2022	X		\$20.00			DUES *
2/11/2022	X	Debit		\$15.00		AIS - Juarez e-membership
Totals			\$20.00	\$576.30	-\$556.30	
Ending Balance					\$6,033.24	2/28/2022
* Juarez \$20/#105 (Kelsen).						
Expense receipts/invoices can be mailed to "P.O. Box 27773, Tucson, AZ, 85726" for reimbursement.						
Documents must be accompanied with reason/purpose for expense						

## Species Irises, Part XI: *Iris albicans* and varieties

Well, it seems that TAIS president Kevin Kartchner is on a roll discovering and identifying more types of iris that we can grow in our gardens! In January, he put *Iris unguicularis*, the Winter Iris, on our radar, and in February, he realized that his "old white" iris is actually *I. albicans*, the White Flag Iris. It is also known as the Cemetery Iris and the White Cemetery Iris, since it was often planted on graves in Muslim regions of the world. Native to northern Africa and throughout the Middle East, it was later introduced to Spain and other parts of Europe, as well as America.

According to an article on Wikipedia, *I. albicans* is most likely the oldest iris in cultivation and has been so since about 1400 BC. And that "It appears in a wall painting of the Botanical Garden of Tutmosis III in the Temple of Amun at Karnak in ancient Thebes dated around 1426 BC." This is the illustration I mentioned in my presentation about "The Iris in Fine Art," but I cannot find a photo showing it in that temple anywhere!

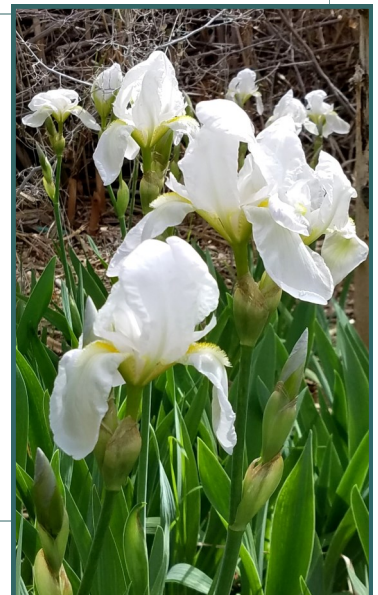
*I. albicans* grows to a height of 16-20". Two to three fragrant white flowers are born on each stem. The beards are white tipped in yellow, and become totally yellow in the throat of the blossom. There may be green veins on the hafts. Secondary stems are spur-like and buds look silvery or gray. Dykes mentioned that the leaves often tend to have a slight twist to them. I noticed that the ones I got from Kevin at our Sale and at the January meeting have leaves that are somewhat thinner than my tall bearded, and that they are more green compared to the bluish-green of my TBs. One variety, 'Madonna' (originally called *I. madonna*), has purple flowers. It is believed to be a sport of *I. albicans* and Dykes noted that it needs more sun than the white type. In his book, *The Genus Iris*, Dykes points out that this is an unusual case in which "the albino form of an iris was reported and named before the colored form." He states that even though the falls of *I. albicans* appear to be pointed, they are not so when flattened out.

This iris is a natural hybrid, but according to the AIS Wiki, no one quite knows which species might have mingled to form it. Many believe that the hybridization was ancient. It has 44 chromosomes, so one of the parents had to have had 48 and the other parent 40. *I. albicans* has limited fertility. There is at least one cultivar of the purple 'Madonna' form: '*Wanganui Gem*' by Jean Stevens of New Zealand. It's been sold there since 1930 and is called 'The Gem.' This 6-8"-tall iris reblooms and has a slight fragrance. It was formed by a cross between 'Madonna' and *I. chamaeiris*. See photo at right and a drawing of 'Madonna' on p. 1.

The Species Iris Group of North America, SIGNA, states that *I. albicans* grows best on sunny banks and slopes, and that it is susceptible to bacterial soft rot in cold and wet climates. They advise growing it in Zones 5-8. The AIS Wiki recommends a site with good drainage, and maintains that its cultivation habits seem to be the same as those of TBs. Kevin reported that his were growing in the yard when he bought his previous house 31 years ago (in Zone 9), and they performed well no matter where he planted divisions - sun, shade, drier, or wetter. It blooms weeks earlier than his tall bearded and is attractive in clumps since the flowers are smaller than those of TBs. Kevin moved many divisions of this plant to his new house last year, as well as sold them at our Sale in September, and gave them away at our meeting in January. He mentioned that this species survived the Aspen Fire on Mount Lemmon in 2003 - they were planted around his parents' cabin there. Interestingly, this plant has been deemed to have low flammability by the Tasmanian Fire Service, who endorse it as being suitable to grow within a building protection zone.

Start your iris season early and expand your number of iris species with *I. albicans*! Why not give it a try? - SC

Sources: Wikipedia article on [Iris albicans](#), AIS Iris Wiki [article](#) on same, Species Iris Group of North America (SIGNA) [website](#), K. Kartchner



From top: *Iris albicans* (2 photos by Kevin Kartchner of plants in his garden) and 'Wanganui Gem' (from AIS wiki). See a drawing of the purple 'Madonna' variety at the bottom of p. 1 (from *The Genus Iris* by W. R. Dykes)



## TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2022

Kevin Kartchner - President

Bonnie Else - Vice President

Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account

Martin Juarez – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

Diane Pavlovich & Sally Vega - Programs & Publicity

Joyce Knill & Sandy Ellis - Hospitality/Door Prizes

Joyce Knill - Birthday cards

Susan Schaefer - Membership Chairperson

Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

## What to do in the Iris Garden during March:

Keep area free of leaves, weeds and pests.

From January through April, iris plants put up 90% of their growth, so they need more water during this active growth period.

If you are following Susan Schaefer's method, fertilize irises weekly with Super Bloom or equivalent (middle number 50 or higher) mixed according to directions on package. If you are following Adam from TBG's organic method, continue applying fish emulsion every two weeks and humic acid as desired.



## Tip Exchange

### Commercial Sources for Japanese Iris

[Mt Pleasant Iris Farm](#) - it is also site of a National Display Garden of Japanese iris

[Ensata Gardens](#)

[Cascadia Iris Farm](#)

[Aitkens Salmon Creek Garden](#)

[Draycott Gardens](#) - they have several for \$6-\$8

[Greywood Farm](#)

[Wildwood Gardens](#) - they have several for \$6-\$7

More info at website for the [Society for Japanese Iris](#)

## Iris Limerick:

There was a young girl from Les Eyzies  
Whose garden was full of surprises.  
She grew bright red iris  
And purple papyrus,  
That delightful young girl from Les Eyzies.  
- Sue Clark



'Shekinah' (1918)

## Did You Know?

Once every ten years, Holland holds a huge plant exposition called [Floriade](#). It is occurring this year from April 14 to October 9 with the theme "Growing Green Cities." Flowers, vegetables, and fruit are featured. A prototype of a future urban green district called Hortus is featured in the Arboretum. This celebration of all things plants is centered in Amsterdam and Almere. - SC - Sources: U of A travel brochure, Wikipedia article on "Floriade"

*"One of the most delightful things about a garden is the anticipation it provides." - W E Johns, [The Passing Show](#)*



## A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Grace Sturtevant and her half-brother Robert were instrumental in the founding of the American Iris Society. Their father was a noted agronomist and was the first director of the New York State Agriculture Experiment Station. Grace illustrated some of his scientific papers. After his death, she and Robert purchased a property called Wellesley Gardens in Massachusetts in 1901. Grace imported irises from growers in Europe and began hybridizing irises in 1910. By 1915, her garden had become a tourist attraction. Three of Grace's introductions, 'Afterglow,' 'Shekinah' (both yellow), and the lavender 'B. Y. Morrison,' won medals at the Massachusetts Horticultural Exhibition in 1917. Her reputation was established! She opened a nursery called Glen Road Iris Gardens near her home, and then put out her first iris catalog in 1918. Grace was intrigued by iris genetics and put great efforts into improving yellow irises. 'Shekinah' (1918) (photo above) made a list of the top 25 American irises in 1925. It is in the lineage of nearly every yellow iris today. Her white 'Taj Mahal' (1920) was considered the best white iris for many years.

Grace's philosophy of iris breeding: *"Good substance and form, attractive coloring and above all, a pleasing balance of the whole are prime requirements; height, branching and size (qualities which give balance) are merely desirable. New introductions must be distinct, preferably in color as that receives general acknowledgment."* She even withdrew some of her cultivars from circulation when they were not up to her standards. No wonder she is called "America's First Lady of Iris!"

In 1920, Grace urged registration of new plant varieties and suggested that awards be given to irises grown in gardens over those at shows. That same year, she wrote an article for *The Flower Grower* urging the formation of a "central body" to gather information on irises and on which ones are worthwhile to grow and which should be tossed in the discard bin. In this article she announced an upcoming meeting at the NY Botanical Gardens (the meeting at which the AIS would be formed). - SC

Sources: Wikipedia article on [Grace Sturtevant](#) and "Prologue to 1920," by Bob Pries in *The Early Years - Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES, AIS Bulletin, 2020*